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What Do You Know of Daniel?

The following is an excerpt from the book, *Thriving in Babylon*, by Larry Osborne:

He's one of the most famous characters in the Old Testament. Many of us think we know his story. We think we know it well. But few of us really do. His name is Daniel. For some of us his name brings to mind a fiery furnace and a scary night in a lions' den. For others it elicits images of detailed prophecy charts with a lot of small print, dotted lines, and cross references. Yet neither Daniel's miracles nor his prophecies make up the main point of the book that bears his name. They're an important part. But focusing on them leaves us with a highly abridged version that omits the most important parts.

It's Not An Adventure Story

Growing up in a Christian home, I always thought the book of Daniel was an adventure story. I assumed the main point was that God would deliver me from danger and persecution if I had enough faith and did the right thing. The fire couldn't harm me and the lions wouldn't eat me.



But if that's Daniel's main point, he and God have some serious explaining to do. When it comes to fiery furnaces and hungry lions, Daniel and his friends aren't examples. They're exceptions.

No matter how godly we become, our odds of surviving the martyr's fire and the lions' appetites are rather bleak. As far as I know, Daniel and his friends are the only ones who ever walked out unscathed. Everyone else perished, dying a horrible and agonizing death.

That's why it's such a huge mistake to turn Daniel into an adventure story. It not only obscures the main point, but it also sends a blatantly false message: If we do the right thing, God won't let anything bad happen to us. He'll rescue us from the furnace and the lions.

Yet nothing could be further from the truth. God's best have often suffered the worst this world has to offer. Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, evil and injustice have had a field day. Bad things happen to good and godly people all the time. As if to drive this point home, the first story in the Bible after the fall of Adam and Eve is the disturbing account of a wicked brother killing his godly sibling in a dispute over how to best worship God (Genesis 4)! And that's on page four!!!

The rest of the Bible is filled with similar stories. Unfortunately, my Sunday school teachers forgot to include any of them in our curriculum. These sordid accounts never made it onto the flannelgraph or into craft time. Maybe my teachers thought we'd stop coming if we ever found out....

Jesus and his followers would face injustice and persecution. He experienced them himself. The same goes for all the apostles. In fact, fiery trials were considered to be such a normal part of the Christian experience that the apostle Peter wrote that we shouldn't be surprised when they come our way. They are neither strange nor unusual (1 Peter 4.12-19).

Now this doesn't mean that God won't deliver us, or somehow can't. He will and he can. But more often than not, our full deliverance won't take place in this world. It will take place in the next world. And that's why turning Daniel's book into an adventure story about God's power to deliver us from fiery furnaces and hungry lions is such a bit mistake...